

In Farfetched Figures: The Humor of Linguistic Deviance, ed. Don L.F. Nilsen.  
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**Aphorism and Rugby:  
A Reading of Bumper Stickers**

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The slogans in question frequently resemble the proverb or epigram in their content, structure and function. Relying upon a combination of esoteric knowledge and multivocality (punning and double entendre being favorite plays), these expressive statements range from subtle to blunt in the conveyance of a message. A critical feature of these sayings is their ostentatious display. Many of the slogans are calculated to flout convention

and tempt social disapproval through the import of shock value. The expressions associate rugby with sex, violence and ferocity, virility, fellowship and communion, and in general, rugged individualism. In keeping with the emic value placed upon performance, these slogans are geared to arouse a response--albeit possibly an internal one--on the part of viewers. The sayings make a statement about the rugger which he consciously intends to project. A sense of marginality is cultivated, and a species of outlawhood is extolled in print. As a frequent passenger between the everyday world and the liminal period of the rugby event, the rugger appropriately displays many of his sentiments on the bumper of his car. Metaphoric and bisociative processes, as well as liminal symbology, are present in the verbal artifacts.

Proclamations of masculinity are found in numerous bumper stickers and T-shirts:

It takes leather balls to play rugby  
Rugby players never die--they just lose their balls  
Never touch a rugger's ball  
Rugby players eat pig balls for breakfast  
Peter Longprong--Expert fine and fancy frigging.

The value of rugby is also declaimed:

Rugby is better than sex--almost  
Rugby--An equal opportunity sport  
Rugby--Elegant violence.

This last assertion alludes to an aesthetic which informs the entire rugby event. Other sentiments turn on esoteric knowledge of rugby jargon. For instance:

Only fuckin' beats ruckin'  
Get your rucks off--Play rugby  
When in doubt, whup it out  
Scrum together  
Support your local hooker--Play rugby.

Clearly, sexuality is a unifying theme in the slogans, imparting a strong **symbolic** association to the rugby event.

Fraternity and communitas are reflected throughout the logos:  
There are no winners in rugby--Only survivors  
I'd rather be naked  
Give blood+Play rugby.

- This last slogan incorporates a visual pun--a black comedic **parody** of the Red Cross--into its import. A similarly multivocal expression exists in the following variants:

Rugby players eat their dead  
Rugby players eat their mates.

While the surface **allusion** is to a recent book [Read, Piers Paul, Alive, (New York: Avon, 1974)] documenting a case of cannibalism among ruggers surviving a plane wreck, reference to cunnilingus and homosexuality may be inferred. Double entendre should not cloud the implications of communitas and sacramentality implicit here. Tied to this complex are the notions of marginality and outlawhood expressed in such logos as

Be an underground athlete--Play rugby  
Jesse James International Rugby Tournament 1976  
Rugby is best played on grass.

Several slogans remain to be considered. Female ruggers may sport such logos as

Mother Rugger

or

Iron Ovaries,  
which neutralize or subvert conventional sex and role  
stereotypes. [Role inversion and flirtation with taboo--in the  
former example, the allusion to incest is unmistakable--are  
typical conceits in the ruggers' repertoires.]. Mates and  
groupies are represented in print as

Rugger Hugger.

P~Perhaps the most innocuous, yet most telling, of all the bumper  
stickers observed is the one which proclaims  
Happiness is rugby.

From a functional viewpoint, the promotion of social cohesion  
beyond a subcultural level is merely a latent characteristic of  
these verbal artifacts. The altered, personally-involving nature  
of the performer-audience relationship is principally  
antagonistic. Interaction is invited virtually through assault.  
The impact of the slogans resides in the challenge to convention,  
**ironically** issued by supporters of the status quo. In this  
sense, the persuasive power of the slogans may be amplified;  
rather than being merely decontextualized, "proverbs" may be  
transmogrified, and infused with a vitality unattainable in an  
oral situation. While the rugby bumper sticker and T-shirt logos  
promote in-group identification and solidarity esoterically, the  
exoteric import of their message is the true structuring element  
of the performer-audience relationship.